

MATWATCH

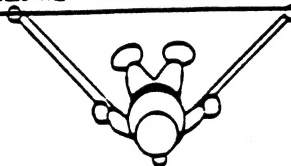
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Megapowers Tangle

JOHN STUDD WINS
WWF ROYAL RUMBLE
AT HOUSTON SUMMIT



HOUSTON - Big John Studd, just back in the WWF after a two-year sabbatical and the 27th man to enter, won the second annual ROYAL RUMBLE Sunday afternoon at the Houston Summit. Studd eliminated Ted DiBiase at the 65:00 mark of a 30-man time rotation battle royal where a competitor was added every two minutes.

ORDER OF ENTRANCE: 1. Ax 2. Smash 3. Andre the Giant 4. Curt Hennig 5. Ronnie Garvin 6. Greg Valentine 7. Jake Roberts 8. Ron Bass 9. Shawn Michaels 10. Butch Miller 11. Honky Tonk Man 12. Tito Santana 13. Bad News Brown 14. Marty Jannetty 15. Randy Savage 16. Arn Anderson 17. Tully Blanchard 18. Hulk Hogan 19. Luke Williams 20. Koko B. Ware 21. Warlord 22. Big Bossman 23. Akeem 24. Brutus Beefcake 25. Terry Taylor 26. Barbarian 27. Studd 28. Hercules Hernandez 29. Rick Martel 30. DiBiase.

Ironically, the Demolition duo pounded each other soundly in the first two minutes before Andre's entrance and then the next four contestants went to work on the Giant. Throughout the Rumble, pockets of face vs. face and heel vs. heel confrontations surfaced much heavier than last year's event, won by Jim Duggan. At one point, Arn Anderson and Randy Savage teamed to eliminate Michaels. Interesting clashes of former crossover alliance foes included Tully Blanchard vs. Curt Hennig and Savage vs. Hennig.

Andre lasted 14:40 before Roberts, the third man out, returned with Damien and scared the big guy into eliminating himself. The Anderson-Blanchard pair was later bounced with a double clothesline by Hogan.

The Hogan-Savage clash came when the WWF champion was trying to roll out Bad News Brown and Hogan, attempting to help, caused both Brown and Savage to go out. Liz Poffo rushed to the ring in her stocking feet to keep a slugfest from developing. A reluctant Savage finally shook Hogan's hand and put off for three weeks the ultimate split between the two (Feb. 3 on NBC).

Hogan faced the challenge of his latest foes, Akeem and Bubba Bossman around the 42-minute mark and survived a piledriver before being dumped by Bubba. But Hogan pulled Bossman out from the outside and proceeded with a post-elimination brawl that saw Bubba taking shots into the ringside bell and a steel case.

The final threesome of DiBiase, Akeem and Studd battled until Studd forced Akeem out in one of the weaker blows of the battle. DiBiase, who in pre-match taped interviews apparently sold his original position to Slick in order to enter last, took some nasty bumps before Studd finally slammed him over. Bodyguard Virgil, attempting revenge on Studd, was destroyed by Big John after the bell.

ORDER OF ELIMINATION: 1. Smash 2. Garvin 3. Roberts 4. Ax 5. Andre 6. Honky Tonk Man 7. Bass 8. Valentine 9. Michaels 10. Jannetty 11. Hennig 12. Santana 13. Miller 14. Ware 15. Williams 16., 17. Tully & Arn (together) 18. Warlord 19., 20. Brown & Savage (together) 21. Hogan 22. Bossman 23. Taylor 24., 25. Beefcake & Hercules (together) 26. Barbarian 27. Martel 28. Akeem 29. DiBiase.

MATCH RATING: DRAW-PLUS...a lot of heat in the middle and Hennig took the nastiest bumps in the first third. But the match seemed to lose steam after Hogan's elimination and the last 15 minutes lost its zip with the crowd.

Other matches on the pay-per-view card:

JIM DUGGAN & HART FOUNDATION D. DINO BRAVO & ROUSEAUS (2-3 falls): The first fall was set up with a side suplex on Bret by Bravo, followed by a flying tackle from top rope by Jacques and pin by Raymond at 4:22.

In fall 2, Bret took six 2-counts, including one with an abdomen crusher, before tagging Duggan at 12:06. Hacksaw catapulted both Bret and Neidhart onto Raymond and Duggan scored the pin at 12:52. The deciding fall was set up when Bravo kicked Bret off a reverse cradle and Duggan clobbered Dino with the 2x4 and Bret took the fall at 16:56. Rating: DRAW. BEST LINES - JESSE: "Why are they chanting USA when the Hitman comes from Calgary, Canada?"; GORILLA: "I've always advocated 2 refs in a 6-man tag." JESSE: "If that'd been the case, Gorilla, how would you have been successful?"

WWF LADIES TITLE: ROCKIN' ROBIN (Champion) D. JUDY MARTIN: Already a candidate for worst match of '89, Gorilla's line, "The tank looks a little empty in both of 'em," was the best of the day. Martin tried a powerslam at 1:44 and Robin a Boston crab at 2:18. Robin offered the worst DDT I've ever seen at 4:48 but

she finally won it with a cross body block from the top rope at 6:28. Sherri Martel, who challenged the winner, was horrible from the booth with Jesse & Gorilla. Rating: DOUBLE BOMB.

POSEDOWN: RICK RUDE VS. ULTIMATE WARRIOR. Not much here. Rude lost the crowd vote on every pose, although---as Ventura pointed out---he's probably more defined in the abdominal area. The proverbial attack by Rude on Anabolic came after the final posedown (which Rude bloopered as a "melody," instead of medley of poses). He hit Warrior with a steel bar and choked him. When Anabolic finally recovered, he attacked all the WWF agents and chopped Nick Bockwinkel. RESTHOLD...BEST LINES: GORILLA, "If we were voting on hip action, Rude would be the winner."; JESSE, "His (Anabolic's) hair's too long...you can't see his trapezius."

MATCH FOR THE CROWN - HAKU D. HARLEY RACE. I just hate to see Harley go out this way. The storyline on this one was Bobby Heenan pulling for both guys ("I'm for you, Haku, you know that, Buddy"; "Harley, I'm behind you."). After both men missed flying headbutts, Haku superkicked Race for the win at 9:02. Harley really tried to do some of his old moves and managed a piledriver on the floor on Haku at 8:20. But the crowd never really got into this one (wonder why?) and the four minutes it took to bring Haku to the ring on his throne were excruciating. Rating: RESTHOLD.

ROYAL RUMBLINGS: I found the Rumble itself fairly entertaining, even though it went through spurts of excitement. But I think it peaked too early...The rest of this card appeared Titan had simply mailed it in and it wasn't worth the \$16.95 charged in most quarters. I insist it should have been a USA special...Every interview was pre-taped and the taped drawing of numbers for Rumble position wasn't executed as well as Titan usually does...Gorilla and Jesse did a creditable job and some of Gorilla's lines during the women's match were almost too honest for Titan.

Technically, Kervin Silfies deserves big kudos for great direction during the Rumble. Only one elimination was missed and the camera work was on the money during the Hogan-Bossman brawl...But on our feed, a couple of times the picture froze for several seconds with time-base corrector problems and twice, the picture went black in the last 20 minutes...There was even some tape jitter on a few of the taped segments...The Duggan hit with the 2x4 was missed until Bravo was falling and then, only on a wide shot.

I have to believe this is Harley's last significant match...I hit the winner right on the Rumble with Studd, even though Friday night, I'd been told it wouldn't be him...The Feb. 3 NBC special also features an I-C title match with Anabolic vs. Valentine, along with the Megapowers vs. Akeem/Bossman...Ken Patera and Jim Brunzell are said to be history...Talk is continuing to surface that Liz may retire after WRESTLEMANIA V (which is headed, surprisingly, back to Trump Plaza April 2 because Trump can guarantee a \$1.6 million gate) but no confirmation...Jesse's best line during the Rumble was when Hogan was doing his poor sport bit against Bossman and Ventura offered, "That's what Hulkamania's all about."...A last item: at times during the Rumble, didn't you get the idea you were watching the first alliance crossover matches in history when Hennig, Tully & Arn and Hogan/Savage were all in at the same time.

MATWATCH RATING: Overall Production: 3.0 (not up to Titan's usual glitz); Quality of Matches, 2.3; Crowd Enthusiasm, 2.8; Announcing, 3.4; Overall Excellence, 2.5. TOTAL: 14.0. This simply was not a PPV show.

DUSTY RHODES LEAVES NWA; SET TO RETURN TO FLORIDA

In a situation rumored for weeks since his firing as NWA booker, Dusty Rhodes resigned from the National Wrestling Alliance after a five-year association with Jim Crockett, only days before his contract was to expire Jan. 24. Rhodes, who won the NWA world belt for three brief reigns, was reportedly being asked to turn heel as a condition of his contract renewal and balked, along with the prospect of a major reduction in his reported \$580,000 salary of last year.

Rhodes is headed for Mike Graham's FLORIDA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING where he will attempt to regender the following which made him a star in the 1970s. The past two weeks, Florida viewers have seen Johnny Ace making serious challenges to Rhodes.

TV TEMPO (Week of Jan. 9-15)

SCALE: PINFALL! - Must See. PILEDRIVER - Excellent
POWERSLAM - Good DRAW - Average RESTHOLD - Fair
BOMB - Poor PLUS - Midscale rating.

(CWA/SYND.) - TAPE: Jerry Lawler-Dutch Mantel
double DQ at Liberty Bowl. Robert Fuller/Sid
Vicious d. Alan Reynolds/Freezer Thompson; Jeff Jar-
rett d. Ready; Bill Dundee/Tracy Smothers/Wendell
Cooley d. The Grim Reapers. ANGLES: Lawler pre-
sented unified world belt; Phil Hickerson says he's
been to Japan and become a Buddhist, so he wants
to be called Mr. Yahi. RESTHOLD.

(WCCW) - Brickhouse Brown d. Jerry Newton; Jeff Jar-
rett d. Frogman; Stud Stable d. Tony Falk/Steve Cox;
Eric Embry loses DQ to Gary Young when he powders
Gary and 6-man brawl erupts; Kerry Von Erich double
countout vs. Sid Vicious. RESTHOLD.

(WWC) - Repeat telecast.

(PWTW) - Final yearender before Awards show. Replay
of tribute to Bruiser Brody. NO RATING.

(LTR) - Robert (Lyle Alzado) deals with his princi-
pal who's mourning the death of his cat and the
Randall kids fight to hold a school dance. Wrest-
ling guests: The Fantastics. RESTHOLD.

(SCW) - RECAP SHOW: Nightmare/Jim Powell d. Jim
Boss/Scrap Iron and Scrap destroys Boss after loss;
Ranger Ross d. Mike Scott but is jumped by Nick
Busich; Chick Donovan loses DQ to Steve Prichard;
Steve Lawler d. Eddie Sweat; Mr. Wrestling II d.
Dutch Mantel; John Michaels d. Jim Bryant; Michaels/
Tom Thumb win DQ over Donovan/Dr. Evil. STUDIO:
Mr. Donnie buys Steve Lawler's contract. BOMB...
I can't describe how horrible the wraparounds were.

(CWF) - Mike Davis d. Randy Hogan; Mr. Chono d.
The Count; Black Bart d. Josh Stroud; Tom Prichard
d. Duze Mason; Tony Anthony/Jerry Stubbs d. Mike
Jackson/Randy Barber. VIDEOS: Jerry Lawler's AWA
title win; Terry Gordy; Robert Fuller/Jimmy Golden
d. Scott Steiner/Shawn Baxter. BOMB-PLUS...about
as low as this group gets and Austin Idol added zip
(nothing) as color commentator.

(AWA) - Recap of SUPERCLASH III: Jimmy Valiant d.
Wayne Bloom; Wahoo McDaniel d. Manny Fernandez in
Indian strap match; Eric Embry d. Jeff Jarrett;
Don Muraco introduced as major contender. No ra-
ting offered, since basically SCIII recap.

(FLORIDA) - 3-way tourney to determine #1 challen-
ger for Mike Graham's Florida title: Match 1...
U.S. Steel DQ over The Terminator when Scott Hall
interferes; Match 2...Steel wins countout over
Hall to get match with Graham. RESTHOLD.

(WWF) - SUPERSTARS: Rockers d. Rusty Riddle/Trent
Knight; Haku d. Jose Luis Rivera; Anabolic Warrior
d. Jose Estrada; Dino Bravo wins squash. From
SNME: Hogan-Akeem, Taylor-Santana. BROTHER LOVE
w. Honky Tonk Man/Greg Valentine. DRAW.
CHALLENGE: Ted DiBiase d. Joe Cruze; Tully & Arn
d. George Terrell/Scott Casey; Bad News Brown d.
Bill Mulkey; From SNME: Hogan-Akeem, Hennig-Ware.
REPLAY: Harts double DQ Honky/Greg. RESTHOLD.
SPOTLIGHT: Key Matches...Harts vs. Honky/Greg,
Danny Davis d. Jim Powers. Curt Hennig steals Ric
Flair's "whether you like it or don't like it..."
line in interview. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

(NWA/TBS) - WCW: Eddie Gilbert d. Barry Windham
by DQ when Flair interferes; NWA TV TITLE: Rick
Steiner retains with DQ win over Mike Rotundo when
Steve Williams & Kevin Sullivan run in. Sullivan
& Williams d. Randy Hogan/Mike Collins; Road War-
riors d. Mike Jackson/Dale Lapyrouse (Dale does a
stretcher job); Other winners: Larry Z/Al Perez,

Original Midnights, Dick Murdoch, M Ex, Luger/
Sting; Michael Hayes returns to d. Paul Lee. DRAW-
PLUS...two excellent matches and the overall per-
formance level amplified well over past months.
A.M.: Michael Hayes/JYD d. Russian A's; Road War-
riors d. Bob Emery/Josh Stroud and afterward, get
into studio brawl with Varsity Club. Ellering is
bumped hard into Paul E. Dangerously. Steve Casey/
Dustin Rhodes/Kendall Windham d. Lapyrouse/Keith
Steinborn/Eddie Sweat; Other winners: P & Z,
Q.M.E. RESTHOLD-PLUS...hey, we actually had an
angle on this show!
NWA MAIN EVENT: Rotundo d. Curtis Thompson; Perez
d. Agent Steel; Hawk/Ellering/Dr. Death lose to
Dusty Rhodes/Steiner/JYD when Steiner packages
Ellering. RESTHOLD-PLUS. The Perez-Steel match
shouldn't have been on this show and it doesn't
make sense to show a match with Williams & the
Warriors teaming when they've begun a feud.

(NWA/SYND.) - NWA PRO: Flair d. Eddie Gilbert by
holding trunks after J.J. Dillon interferes (great
match!); Steiner d. Steel; P & Z d. Thompson/Bill
Holliday; JYD/Hayes d. Emery/Cruze; O.M.E. d.
Jackson/Max Miles. DRAW...for Flair-Gilbert.
W. WIDE: Fantastics d. O.M.E. in rubber match
when Jim Cornette (in Fantastics' corner) assists
but O.M.E. & Paul E. destroy Jim afterward; Other
winners: Hayes/JYD, P & Z, Dick Murdoch, Russian
A's. RESTHOLD-PLUS.

LINE OF THE WEEK - 1. Paul E. Dangerously, TBS,
on Michael Hayes' reciting BAD TO THE BONE: "I
wonder if Michael Hayes pays royalties to George
Thorogood for his interviews. 2. Cornette, TBS:
"Paul E.'s the kind of guy that would cause a mo-
ther to have her tubes tied, change her name and
move to another state." 3. Brickhouse Brown, WCCW,
on Iceman Parsons: "You're just upset because you
don't know who your daddy is." 4. Curt Hennig,
WWF: "I see all of these acne scars and sloppy
dressers and I can't see how these people can go
through life so imperfect." 5. Sylvia, WCCW: "It
(kendo stick) is my American Express card. I never
leave home without it." 6. Hayes, on Steiner's
hand puppet Alex: "I used to see a lot of them when
I drank a lot." 7. Samuel Kent, SCW: "Joe Peci-
no's hard to understand. He's from Georgia, you
know." 8. Hulk Hogan, WWF: "Mirror, mirror on the
wall---what kind of gasoline makes me want to brawl?"
9. Jesse Ventura, WWF: "If the truth hurts, McMa-
hon, you sit here in pain." 10. Cornette, TBS:
"Paul E., you're like a nest of cockroaches, you
can't quite stomp 'em out!" 11. Dangerously, NWA
PRO: "The man (Cornette) not only tells jokes---
he IS a joke." 12. Cornette, TBS: "Paul E., you
are a zit on the hind side of life." 13. Bobby
Heenan, WWF, on Bill Mulkey: "Looks like Larry,
Darryl & Darryl all put together." 14. Jim Ross,
TBS: Sting & Luger just want to be all that they
can be...and that's no commercial for the Army." 15.
Steiner, NWA PRO, and Ross: JIM, "That dog is
shedding." RICK, "Watch out...he might pee on you,
too!" 16. David Crockett & Paul E., TBS: DAVID,
"They (O.M.E.) are like Jekyll & Hyde." PAUL E.,
"Boy, I'd like to give you a potion." 17. Dennis
Condrey, NWA: "Cornette's mother's real easy to
identify...she'll have a mattress tied to her back."
18. Larry Zbyszko, WWF: "Diamonds ARE forever, Ric
Flair---the only difference is the people who pos-
sess them." 19. Tony Schiavone, WWF: "Paul, please
take a Valium." 20. Paul E., TBS: "Calm down, Da-
vid, drink some decaffeinated." 21. Cornette, TBS:
"Dennis Condrey is so sick---for bedtime stories,
he reads his kids the obituaries." 22. Cornette,
"I'm 27 years old...I ain't ready for the rest home
yet!" 23. Ric Flair, TBS: "I'm the man that
brought Moses Malone to Atlanta."

STRONGEST COMMENTS - 1. Gary Hart, TBS: "Al Perez
is the greatest piece of work to come along since
young Ricky Flair." 2. Dusty Rhodes, TBS: "When
you ARE the NWA...when you ARE professional wrest-
ling, no punk kid is gonna take the U.S. title
from Dusty Rhodes."

Page 4 / MATWATCH
Jan. 16-22 / Vol. 1, No. 30

TASTELESS COMMENT - Slick, WWF: "Savage, if Akeem beats you next week, it'll be the first step toward becoming the first black heavyweight champion."

INFO OF THE WEEK - Dangerously, TBS: "Dennis Condrey was named 'Lover Boy' by Cornette's mama."

NICKNAMES OF THE WEEK - 1. Paul E., TBS: calling the O.M.E. finisher "The Human Coughdrop." 2. Manny Fernandez, AWA, calling Tatsumi Fujinami "Zipper-head."

BEST NARRATION - Hayes on "BAD TO THE BONE."

HALLUCINATION AWARD - Larry Z, NWA PRO: "I've been defending the Western States belt so much that no one will come and take it away from me."

BEST PICTURES - 1. Missy Hyatt, TBS: sighing after a kiss from Flair. 2. TBS, Dangerously's rabbit ears behind David's head. 3. WCCW, Embry powdering Young and ensuing brawl.

DREADED GLITCH AWARDS - TBS, 1. NWA logo appears over J.J. with no name super; 2. Ring announcer audio announcing eliminated men from Bunkhouse Stampede overshadows Dusty interview.

OOPS AWARD - NWA PRO, for editing over Flair's pin of Gilbert when Eddie's tights were apparently pulled too low for a family show.

BLOOPER AWARD - Rhodes, NWA PRO, for saying "big dues are gonna be paid in 1988!"

BOO AWARD - SCW, for an embarrassing second edition of Tommy Rich sitting with Mr. Donnie, maybe the most embarrassing personality ever.

CABLE RATINGS RAP

(Dec. 31-Jan. 2)	Ratings	Share	Homes (Millions)
WWF PRIME TIME (USA 1/2)	3.2	4.7	1.498
WWF ALL-AM (USA 1/1)	2.9	6.1	1.357
NWA MAIN EVENT (TBS 1/1)	2.7	4.6	1.296
NWA WORLD C.W. (TBS 12/31)	2.1	3.8	1.008
NWA A.M. C.W. (TBS 12/31)	2.1	6.0	1.008

(Jan. 7-9)

NWA WORLD C.W. (TBS 1/7)	3.1	5.3	1.488
WWF PRIME TIME (USA 1/9)	3.0	4.4	1.404
WWF ALL-AM (USA 1/8)	2.9	6.1	1.357
NWA MAIN EVENT (TBS 1/8)	2.2	3.3	1.056
NWA A.M. C.W. (TBS 1/7)	1.6	4.6	.768

(ANALYSIS: Notice how steady the numbers remain for WWF All-American Sundays at noon. The first NWA 7:05 show topped a 3 rating and nearly went to 1.5 million homes. TBS was very pleased with the 2.1/6 on New Year's Eve in the morning, partly because of a good Dangerously show and partly because of a 6.8 share lead-in from CHiPs, in a one-shot at 10:05. NWA MAIN EVENT took it on the chin opposite the Bears-49ers game on 1/8 but it also faced playoff competition New Year's Day and did okay.)

TUBE TALK

The Eddie-Barry and Eddie-Flair matches were both first-rate over the weekend. With Dusty out, you can bet on Eddie being in the U.S. title match with Barry for sure Feb. 20 on the PPV.... Paul E. & David worked a bit better together Sat.

but you can tell David still isn't thrilled about the whole thing....The CWF show looks like it's in the midst of uncertainty and I hate that because I'm fond of many of the people in that association....The Southern show will no longer feature the Tommy Rich/Mr. Donnie Hour. Jerry Blackwell is taking back over booking chores from Rich.

Vince using lots of SNME stuff on his syndie shows....NWA goes to post-production on its shows in February....Tom Prichard may be coming into the NWA as Dennis Condrey's partner, instead of Brian Pillman---who apparently will stay a face.PWTW off in Columbus, GA, again and WCCW is now a half-hour later in Anchorage AK....Pedicino taped three more ATLANTIC COAST shows Jan. 13 but Rock & Roll Express only significant names. Nelson Royal wants to establish the ACW style on TV before he brings in Nikita Koloff and othersRoyal is being forced to a 7 a.m. Sunday slot on his flagship station in Charlotte, WPCQ.

LEARNING THE ROPES, which is drawing good kids numbers in the U.S., is doing too many storylines that could be produced about anything, not just a quasi-connection with pro wrestling....TBS average ratings for the Sept.-Dec. period: WCW, 2.6; NWA MAIN EVENT, 2.2; A.M., 1.5....The first 7:05 WCW increased the share of its lead-in, U.S. OLYMPIC GOLD, by 52%....This weekend, Pedicino gives out his annual awards on PWTW and the only one I seriously disagree with my friend on is the MATCH OF THE YEAR choice, the WWF tourney at WM4....Speaking of Pedicino's SUPERSTARS, the NWA's two syndie shows are not in the Atlanta market and won't air on TBS because of local stations' reluctance to clear programs already airing on the SuperStation. Why doesn't TBS okay NWA PRO to air on Pedicino's Saturday night block on WVEU? It can only give an extra boost to the Omni show promotions.

In an upcoming MATWATCH, we'll offer a graph to help you chart the progress of the NWA and WWF cable ratings over the last three months. We still have not been able to obtain ESPN numbers for the AWA, not that they'll be any big threat....Because of our trek to Washington next week, we will not offer our usual LINES OF THE WEEK, etc., and I hope everyone will be patient for that week only but I won't physically be able to watch all of the shows for that much specificity.WWF is planning a 3-hour special (not live, I don't believe) to oppose the Turner PPV CHITOWN RUMBLE Feb. 20. This is probably going to be just an extended version of PRIME TIME....

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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By STEVE BEVERLY

Do you understand when I say I'm no longer surprised at anything which occurs in pro wrestling? The post-SUPER CLASH III war between Jerry Jarrett and Verne Gagne has been all too predictable. And where have we heard this story before? PRO WRESTLING USA? The Meadowlands?

The story as we know it: Jarrett, who provided at least two-thirds of the competitors for the Chicago pay-per-view show, including Gagne's own AWA world champion, Jerry Lawler, hasn't received one penny of revenue from Gagne. Gagne is telling the CWA/World Class chief the AWA lost substantial dollars on the show (which probably is no lie, even though checks from individual cable operators will not be totaled for 30-60 days).

FNN/SCORE, which produced and coordinated PPV clearances for the show, is interested in doing another pay card April 25. FNN officials have told MATWATCH the show produced a buy-in of approximately 0.8% of potential viewers, or 44,000 homes.

But the bitterness between Gagne and Jarrett is running so deep, the future of another show is threatened. Jarrett has reportedly told FNN he'll never work again with Gagne and the following items have since surfaced:

---One report had Gagne wanting Lawler to drop the AWA half of the new "unified" title to Larry Zbyszko, who---as of last Wednesday night---was still with the NWA.

---Lawler no-showed for the most recent scheduled TV taping, a taping which was scrapped.

---Gagne rescheduled his next ESPN taping for this Friday and reportedly wants Lawler to drop the belt to WWF castoff Don Muraco. Lawler has flatly said no.

---Reports are that if Lawler isn't at the Milwaukee taping, Gagne will pull another Stan Hansen-Nick Bockwinkel situation and slap the belt on Muraco anyway.

All of this in the wake of the three-month drive to "unify" the AWA/World Class belts, even though the unification series was clumsily handled, as previously documented here.

On the pay-TV side of this situation: FNN/SCORE would like to work with Jarrett and last week, Lawler was on the phone enticing SCORE officials to forget about another show with Gagne and dealing strictly with Jarrett.

Two drawbacks exist to that scenario: (1) with only the afternoon LEGENDS OF WORLD CLASS show, Jarrett has a weak ESPN slot with which to promote a future PPV. (2) While FNN personnel have expressed interest to MATWATCH in another show if Jarrett could put together a consortium with Nelson Royal, David Woods and, perhaps, Jerry Blackwell wrestlers, they also admit reticence in scheduling such a show with predominantly Southern-based wrestlers. As one FNNer told us, "You'd have to ask yourself how well a show like that would sell in Seattle and Minneapolis."

Plus, SCORE itself is in a rather tenuous financial situation. Now only a weekend service, the network is finding itself forced to accept more paid commercial programs (i.e., SOLOFLEX) to maintain a subsistence, one factor which has temporarily forced wrestling off the network.

Sadly, by the time you read this, we may find ourselves once again with a world champion of Memphis and Dallas and a world champion of Minneapolis. Even though Gagne is most likely the culprit, the split only serves to cheapen the lus-

ter of both promotions, even though Lawler worked hard during 1988 to restore respect to the AWA belt.

What is clear from here is this: Gagne has just signed a one-year renewal with ESPN but he has no time period guarantee. In my view, Jarrett should be pushing ESPN with no delay to take over the weekly late night slot on the sports network with a combination World Class/Memphis show; otherwise, he's going to find it an even tougher struggle to become a competitive #3 among U.S. promotions.

I REMEMBER....Mario Galento

If this appears to be a repeat of my very first MATWATCH nostalgia column, it is. Only it is with deepest sadness.

Mario Galento, known throughout a storied career as "Butch," "The Gentle Brute," and "The Unpredictable One," died of natural causes Jan. 6 in Pensacola, Fla. He was 73.

In a sense, Mario is one reason there is a MATWATCH today. When I first was hooked on this avant garde form of entertainment, Galento was one of the first TV stars who made it compelling.

Those Saturday nights when Mario conducted his running feud on Atlanta's BIG TIME WRESTLING with Butcher Vachon produced some of this sport's greatest soap operas.

Originally one of the country's top heels, Mario once lost the Georgia heavyweight title when a seconding Rocky Marciano knocked out Galento and Buddy Fuller scored the pin.

It was the same Mario Galento who once posted a sign on the back of his car saying FOLLOW ME after an Atlanta card and follow him did a huge crowd for the opening of his "Pizza Arena" in Lilburn.

This same Galento, who loved children, once paid me \$8, a clean 15% of the gross---just as he promised---for selling his biography, THE GENTLE BRUTE, at the matches in Waycross, Ga.

And it was this Galento who delighted fans in Georgia, Florida and the Carolinas with his perpetual hijinks in chasing J.C. Dykes and his Infernos for nearly four years. Galento's babyface turn in Florida came when he ripped J.C.'s red jacket on TV and promptly juiced in the ensuing attack by the blue masked men.

Before his career ended, Mario did a turn as a heel manager, overseeing The Blue Demons in the Sunshine State and The Super Assailants in Georgia. But he never had the same impact as that fast-talking, blue-collar street fighter. Yes, he could have competed favorably with today's stars in the personality department.

His most celebrated wins came by taking a Pontiac GTO tournament in Atlanta in 1961 and a pinfall over Bruno Sammartino before Bruno's glory WWF years. He had one shot at the NWA world title: a 60-minute draw with Gene Kiniski in 1967.

After the late seventies, I'd lost track of Mario until Charlie Platt told me he was living in the Gulf Coast this fall. Even in his fifties, he was a star of my childhood whom you could always count on to give you a colorful show. Born Bonnie Lee Boyette, Mario once told me, "Johnny Cash wrote A BOY NAMED SUE for me because with a name like Bonnie, you had to be tough."

I don't know if Mario's applying his patented hangman today but to his wife, Smoky, and his three sons and three daughters, we extend our deepest sympathy---and our thanks for all the memories your husband and father gave us.

DUSTIN'S TRAIL: Most all insiders feel Dustin Rhodes will follow his father back to Florida. That could shortcircuit the plan to turn Kendall Windham heel.

CLASH V: Dusty & Dustin were to meet Kendal & Barry Windham on CLASH V from Cleveland on TBS Feb. 15. No idea yet on a replacement. The rest of the ST. VAL-
ENTINE'S MASSACRE: 6-MAN TITLE: Road Warriors/Tenryu vs. Sting/Murdoch/JYD; U.S. TAG TITLES: Varsity Club vs. Fantastics; TV TITLE: Steiner vs. Ray Candy; Butch Reed vs. Steve Casey; Lex Luger vs. The Blackmailer (allegedly a J.J. Dillon bounty hunter); and the sixth undecided match. No, it doesn't do much for me on paper.

MURACO'S MOVE: The AWA show Friday on ESPN all but handed Don Muraco the title in his interview. And it was probably the most incomprehensible interview Don has ever done.

SAMOANS STAY: The SST apparently will stay with World Class for now but insiders believe it's only a matter of time before they're NWA-bound.

CWF CHATTER: The circuit has added a mascot, The Continental Cat, and apparently has a full trade arrangement going with Jarrett as Jeff Jarrett, Bill Dundee and several other CWA/World Class stars are announced for upcoming shows.

GARVIN GROANS: Jimmy's return to the NWA comes after the WWF felt they had him signed at Christmas. Garvin reportedly will team with Steiner short-term and possibly turn on him.

VCR THEATRE: Be sure to turn your recorders on Saturday night because Eddie Gilbert's masked partner vs. Flair & Windham will be Ricky Steamboat. The match promises to be a hot one.

RATINGS RAP: The WWF pulled a 10.0 in 247 markets for the week ending Dec. 18. And last week was the first the NWA listed Universal Wrestling Corp. as its syndicator. No ratings available on the shows yet.

TITAN TALK: A series of Savage-Warrior "title vs. title" matches are skedded after the Feb. 3 turn of Randy. John Studd, fresh off his Royal Rumble win, will face Akeem and Hogan still has Bossman matchups.

SEATTLE SLEW: Two NWA teams did jobs for Don Owen pairs in Seattle. The Southern Rockers knocked off the Russian A's and Uncle Ivan did the job for Abughdadein & Buddy Rose when Ivan & JYD lost. But I'm told JYD was over most next to Sting and Flair was cheered big. NWA really disappointed over 4,000 house.

HAWK BALK: At the Seattle card, a fan tossed a beer on Hawk, who promptly scaled to the second level of seats and returned the favor to the fan, who was ejected.

LATE LUGER: Luger missed his regular match in Las Vegas but showed up in time to make the Bunkhouse but one has to question why the problem. Talk that he was talking to the WWF in Connecticut appears unfounded.

WOULD WATTS?: Word has been sent to MATWATCH that former UWF owner Cowboy Bill Watts would indeed listen to a proposal to become NWA booker now. But I don't bet on it happening. Rumors went out last week that both Eddie Gilbert and George Scott had been hired and neither was true.

THURSDAY: That's when the NWA wrestlers will have a meeting with Jack Petrik and Jim Herd and several major items are expected to be discussed, one of which will be that they are not to talk with bulletin writers. I have no problem with that as long as the TBS people answer my questions as best they can, which so far, they have been more than gracious to do, and cordially so.

AIR TIME: Don Owen gave up his Seattle TV time because it was costing him \$600 a week to re-edit for the market, plus air time costs.

MATWATCH NOTES: The annuals have been mailed, so be patient. You know the Postal Service. Next week's issue will be mailed one day late because of my trip to the inauguration.

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